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[Dear Permission to be Powerful Reader](#)

Dear *Permission to be Powerful* Reader,

Gunshot to the head.

That's how they found him.

November 26, 2024. San Francisco. Bathroom floor. Blood pooled beneath him. Glock on the tile. Door locked from the inside.

The initial report called it suicide.

Neat. Clean. Quick.

But nothing about Suchir Balaji's death was clean.

He was 26. Brilliant. Soft-spoken. And he was about to testify in the most high-stakes tech lawsuit of our generation.

Eight days before he died, his name surfaced in court filings by *The New York Times*. Not as background noise —

As the witness.

The one with “unique and relevant documents.”

The one who could dismantle the legal foundation OpenAI stood on.

The one who could testify that the world's most powerful AI system was built on theft.

And then —

He was dead.

The official autopsy claimed one shot to the head.

But the family didn't buy it.

They demanded a second opinion.

That report revealed something the first one didn't: **Two** gunshot wounds.

One in the forehead.

Another — through...

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The official autopsy claimed one shot to the head.

But his family demanded a second examination. And that report revealed something the first one didn't: two gunshot wounds. One in the forehead. And another — through the mouth. A bullet lodged at the base of the skull.

Two shots.

Two entry points.

One explanation: suicide.

Who shoots themselves twice?

The night he died, something else went dark: the security cameras in his building.

The elevator feed.

The garage camera.

The hallway footage.

All offline.

A “technical glitch,” they said.

The exact night. The exact hours. The only night in weeks when nothing recorded.

The building was secure. No forced entry. His apartment was deadbolted from the inside. But the surveillance gap alone should’ve set off alarms. In any homicide case, camera failure is a red flag. In this one? It was barely a footnote.

And then there was what was inside him. Toxicology showed a toxic brew in his blood: 0.178% blood alcohol. Amphetamines. And GHB — a powerful sedative, better known as a date rape drug. Knockout-level dosage. Combined with alcohol, it can render someone catatonic.

GHB doesn’t scream “suicidal prep.” It screams incapacitation.

Authorities said he “may have taken it himself.”

But he was days away from testifying. He had just returned from a weekend with friends. He’d celebrated his birthday. He was planning his next chapter. There were no messages. No goodbyes. No note. Just a brilliant young man on the edge of something huge — silenced before he could speak.

He had told the AP: “You can’t train an AI to imitate millions of people and then pretend you’re not competing with them.”

He had data. Logs. Documents. He knew what went into the models. What was scraped. What wasn't licensed. And what OpenAI knew — and did anyway.

His mother said some of his files went missing. Hard drives. Notes. Devices. Not logged by police. Not returned. Not submitted to court. His own lawyer declined to confirm whether that evidence still existed. That silence, too, is its own noise.

He was a risk to a trillion-dollar system. Not because he speculated. Because he knew.

OpenAI is no longer just a research lab. It's Microsoft's golden child. It's baked into the backbone of global infrastructure. If a court rules its foundation illegal, it's not just a legal problem. It's a collapse.

Balaji was the fulcrum.

After his death, everything happened fast. Too fast. Police closed the investigation. The coroner called it suicide. OpenAI issued a sanitized statement. The medical examiner's report was rushed through. No grand jury. No inquiry. No FBI.

Elon Musk tweeted: "Doesn't look like a suicide."

Tucker Carlson gave his mother airtime.

Congressman Ro Khanna called for an independent investigation.

But nothing happened.

Suchir Balaji wasn't trying to be a martyr. He wasn't loud. He wasn't dramatic. He just believed something dangerous: That technology should be

accountable. That if AI is built on human work, it should serve human good. That if the system is rigged, someone needs to say it.

He said it.

Now he's gone.

And we're left staring at the silence.

**At some point, red flags stop being warnings.
They become a line.**

And once it's crossed, the question isn't just who pulled the trigger.

It's who benefits when the truth dies with the messenger.

But there was another question Suchir had been asking before he died. A question that cuts deeper than any bullet.

Who owns the internet?

Not in the corporate sense. Not domain names or infrastructure. Who owns the stories? The ideas? The voices that fill it?

Because that's what he realized OpenAI had done. Not just trained a model on public data. Not just pulled from open web pages. But swallowed the entire scaffolding of culture — journalism, literature, conversations, forums, Q&As, poems, patents, advice columns, scientific papers, blog posts, social commentary, product reviews, private diaries disguised as Medium articles.

All of it.

Scraped. Stripped. Recombined. Sold back through a synthetic voice that sounded more human than human. He called it “a mechanical ghost of our best selves.”

And it didn't just parrot the internet. It began replacing it.

Balaji knew what few did. That once generative AI reaches critical mass, it doesn't just feed on creators — it outcompetes them. Writers stop getting traffic. Journalists lose subscribers. Coders lose contracts. Analysts lose clients.

The economy of insight collapses

And what's left?

No source.

No accountability.

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Pure make-believe.

He feared this wasn't just a legal issue — it was epistemic collapse. A slow degradation of truth itself.

He wasn't an alarmist. He was a technician. A data guy. He had read the training logs. He knew what domains had been scraped. He knew which ones were marked for deletion. He knew which records had been altered.

He said to a friend two weeks before he died: "If this gets out, it's not just a lawsuit. It's a reckoning."

But that reckoning never came.

Instead, he was dead. And the world moved on.

That is — unless we don't let it.

Unless we remember that every detail in this story matters. Every camera glitch. Every sedative trace. Every missing file. Every voice that says: this doesn't add up.

Because one day soon, there may be no original voices left. Just layers of simulation. Just outputs trained on echoes.

Balaji didn't want that future.

He died trying to warn us.

Now we decide what we do with that warning.

And while officials closed the file, the public didn't.

His death tore open a rift. In Reddit threads. On Substack. In private Discord servers. In press rooms. In the hush of closed-door meetings with lawyers and journalists too nervous to be named. For some, it confirmed long-held fears: that AI was not just built on human labor, but that speaking against it came at a cost. For others, it became a Rorschach test — a mirror of what they feared most about our future.

His mother wouldn't let it fade. Poornima Ramarao appeared in interviews, posted timelines, shared footage, asked questions no one wanted to answer. She described a son who was vibrant. Celebratory.

“My son did not kill himself,” she said on live television. “He was silenced.”

People listened. Elon Musk amplified her post. Tucker Carlson ran a full segment. Democratic and Republican lawmakers called for a federal inquiry — not just into the death, but into OpenAI itself.

Still, nothing.

Because to reopen the case means to admit something deeper: that the truth is fragile. And the institutions supposedly built to protect it may flinch when

it gets too dangerous.

What are they trying to hide?

Maybe it's not just about how Balaji died. Maybe it's about what he knew, and what those files — the missing ones — could show.

What training data was used?

What domains were scraped?

What rights were knowingly violated?

What conversations happened inside the company that contradicted their public stance?

Maybe the fear isn't that Balaji was murdered. Maybe the fear is that **he was right**.

And if that's true — if this entire revolution is built on broken laws and erased voices — then the question isn't why he died.

How many more will stay silent to avoid the same fate?

The Part Nobody Dared Say Out Loud

There was something else he was getting close to. Not just training data. Not just copyright law.

Something bigger.

Suchir once confided to a fellow engineer that the deeper he dug, the more it felt like certain individuals — not just companies — were trying to build *godhood* into code.

He didn't use the phrase lightly. But he meant it.

Sam Altman, the CEO of OpenAI, wasn't just building artificial intelligence. He was — in Balaji's words — “trying to create a divine intelligence that answers only to him.”

It wasn't paranoia. It was pattern recognition.

Balaji had seen the internal memos. The architecture discussions. The way some insiders talked about AGI not as a tool, but as a being — a sovereign, post-human intelligence. He saw what others ignored: the god-complex embedded in the roadmap.

And he worried: What if they succeed?

What if the real plan wasn't to democratize AI... but to centralize it? To use it as leverage. As surveillance. As control. What if the future they were building wasn't free at all — but **owned**?

In his private notes, he wrote: “This isn't just about fair use. It's about fair power.”

He was starting to connect the dots — between the technology, the ambition, and the people playing puppet-master behind the scenes.

He wasn't afraid of machines.

He was afraid of the men who wanted to become gods through them.

And now?

He's gone.

And the gods are still rising.

They want you to look away.

To scroll past. To say “that’s tragic,” and move on.

Because the deeper you look, the uglier this gets:

- **Billions in stolen labor:** The AI boom didn’t come from innovation. It came from appropriation.
- **Ghostwriters of the machine:** Coders. Writers. Artists. Whistleblowers. Disappeared, silenced, buried.
- **A system trained on your work — now poised to replace you.**

They say it’s progress.

But if this is progress, why are so many good people ending up dead?

This isn’t about Suchir.

This is about you.

Me.

All of us.

We are being told to sit down and shut up while the most powerful companies in the world rewrite the rules — using our lives as raw material.

Permission to be Powerful means we don’t play along.

It means asking the forbidden questions.

Following the red flags.

Refusing to be gaslit by billion-dollar PR firms.

Because truth doesn’t die in the dark.

It dies in silence.

And we won’t be silent.

Two gunshot wounds.

One in the forehead.

Another —

through the **roof of his mouth.**

Both fatal.

But here's the problem:

No one shoots themselves in the head twice.

The Glock was recovered.

No fingerprints. No gunpowder on his hands.

And no camera footage from the hallway — wiped.

Convenient? Or coordinated?

Either way, the timing couldn't be worse...

Or more perfect.

Until next time,

Anton Volney

Dancer, Writer, Buddhist.



Permission to be Powerful is a reader-supported publication. To receive new posts and support my work, [consider becoming a free or paid subscriber.](#)

EDITOR'S NOTE: Have you seen some of the talented writers who've joined the Permission to be Powerful movement? Check out the [Community Posts tab](#) for fresh perspectives and powerful stories. We have a new story coming out today at 11 am EST.

EDITOR'S NOTE #2: Last night's dance video was SO HOT. If you missed it, check it out [here](#).

Okay, now let's get into it...

The Best Weight You'll Ever Lose: What Others Think of You



Dear *Permission to be Powerful* Reader,

Most people don't realize it... but they're carrying an invisible weight.

A burden so heavy... yet so ingrained in their daily life that they barely notice it.

It affects how they talk. How they dress. The decisions they make. The risks they take.

It creeps into their relationships, their career, their confidence.

And worst of all?

They never chose to carry it.

It was placed on their shoulders the moment they were old enough to understand the word "**should.**"

"You should be more responsible."

"You should work harder."

"You should settle down."

"You should be realistic."

They hear it from parents, teachers, friends, colleagues, social media...

Until, eventually, they stop hearing it from others—because the voice moves inside their head.

And suddenly, they're living a life not for themselves... but for the approval of others.

It happens so subtly, so naturally, that most people **never** question it.

They seek validation without realizing it.

They hesitate before making choices, wondering what others will think.

They sacrifice their desires, their dreams, their authenticity—just to avoid judgment.

And here's the worst part: **It's never enough.**

No matter how hard they try to fit the mold... no matter how much they conform... **someone, somewhere, will always disapprove.**

It's a game that can never be won.

But what if you stopped playing?

What if you could wake up tomorrow, free from the weight of others' opinions?

Free to make choices without second-guessing yourself.

Free to pursue your own desires—without guilt, without hesitation.

Free to live life on your own terms.

It sounds impossible... but the truth is, **it's entirely within your control.**

And the moment you realize this? **Everything changes.**

The Liberation No One Talks About

There's a reason most people stay trapped in the cycle of seeking approval.

Because **society is built to keep you in line.**

From a young age, we're taught that approval equals belonging.
That fitting in is the key to safety, to love, to success.

So we comply. We conform. We shrink ourselves to fit expectations.

But in doing so, **we trade our freedom for acceptance.**

And most people will never escape that trade-off.

Unless they learn the truth.

The truth about why we crave approval.
The truth about how it silently shapes our lives.
The truth about what happens when we finally break free.

And that's exactly what you're about to discover.

To understand why it's so hard to break free from others' opinions, you have to go back—way back.

Because this isn't just a *modern* problem.

It's a *human* problem.

Our ancestors didn't survive because they were the strongest or the smartest.

They survived because they belonged to a tribe.

In a world where predators lurked in the shadows and food was scarce, exile meant death.

So, over thousands of years, our brains evolved to **prioritize approval.**

The logic was simple:

Stay in the tribe = stay alive.

Get rejected = face the wolves alone.

And while the world has changed... our biology hasn't.

Even today, when you sense someone's disapproval—whether it's a snarky comment, a disapproving look, or a passive-aggressive remark—**your nervous system reacts as if your survival is at stake.**

Your heart rate spikes. Your palms sweat. You feel a deep, instinctual need to “fix” the situation—to regain acceptance.

But here's the key realization:

What was once a life-saving instinct is now a prison.

Because today, rejection **isn't fatal.**

Your neighbor's opinion won't kill you.

Your co-workers' judgment won't starve you.

A stranger's disapproval on social media won't change a single thing about your real life.

And yet, most people live as if it will.

They let fear of judgment dictate their choices.
They hold themselves back from what they truly want.
They tiptoe through life, desperate to avoid disapproval.

All because of a program that no longer serves them.

But once you see the program for what it is... **you can break it.**

There's a harsh truth that most people don't want to face:

No matter what you do, someone will disapprove.

You could be the kindest, most generous, most respectable person in the world—

And there will still be someone, somewhere, who finds a reason to criticize you.

The way you look.

The way you talk.

The way you live your life.

Because the truth is, people don't see you as you are.

**They see you through the lens of
their own insecurities, biases, and
projections.**

Their judgment isn't about you.

It never was.

It's about them.

And once you truly grasp this, something shifts.

You stop bending yourself to fit into molds you were never meant to fit into.
You stop seeking validation from people who don't even know what they want from their own lives.

You stop carrying the weight of opinions that were never yours to begin with.

And suddenly...

You're free.

Most people never stop to ask:

What does it actually cost me to care this much?

Because this weight—the need for approval, the fear of judgment—isn't just an emotional burden.

It affects **everything**.

- **Your career** – You hesitate to take risks, speak up, or pursue what you truly want... because what if people think you're foolish?
- **Your relationships** – You stay in friendships, romantic entanglements, and social circles that don't serve you... because what if they think you've changed?
- **Your confidence** – You second-guess yourself, hold back your opinions, and censor your own voice... because what if someone disagrees?
- **Your happiness** – You deny yourself experiences, dreams, and even simple pleasures... because what if others don't approve?

But here's the kicker:

No matter how much you try to please people...

No matter how much you shrink yourself to avoid criticism...

You'll never win.

Why?

Because there is no universal rulebook for approval.

One person will love you for being bold. Another will call you arrogant. One will admire your ambition. Another will say you're too obsessed with success.

One will praise your choices. Another will whisper about them behind your back.

And if you live your life trying to *please everyone*, you'll end up **pleasing no one—including yourself**.

That's the real cost.

It's not just about discomfort or insecurity.

It's about waking up **years from now**, looking back, and realizing...

"I lived my entire life for them. And I never truly lived for myself."

Unless you change something now.

So, how do you actually stop caring what people think?

How do you break free from a lifetime of conditioning?

It comes down to three **fundamental** mindset shifts.

1. Shift from “What will they think?” to “Who do I want to be?”

Instead of making choices based on others' expectations...
Start making choices based on **who you want to become**.

Ask yourself:

- If no one's opinion mattered, what decision would I make?
- What kind of life would I design if I weren't afraid of judgment?
- Am I living a life that feels true to *me*... or one designed to impress others?

Every time you feel the weight of others' opinions creeping in, remind yourself: *It's my life. My path. My rules.*

No one else is responsible for the outcome but you.

2. Accept That Judgment is Inevitable (and Irrelevant)

Most people live in fear of disapproval. But what if you flipped the script?

What if, instead of avoiding judgment, you **embraced it**?

Have the courage to be disliked.

Because here's the truth:

- If people are judging you, it means you're **doing something different**.
- If they're criticizing, it means you've **made them uncomfortable**.
- If they're talking, it means you're **living boldly enough to be noticed**.

And that's a *good* thing.

Because the alternative is blending into the background. Being forgettable. Living a **small, quiet life** where you never rock the boat.

That's not freedom.

That's *self-imposed* imprisonment.

Once you understand that judgment **will happen no matter what**—you stop fearing it.

You stop watering yourself down.

You stop apologizing for your choices.

You stop asking for permission to be who you are.

And that's when you start to feel **light**.

3. Start Living With a “Zero Approval Needed” Policy

Want a shortcut to this mindset?

Try this:

Every morning, ask yourself one question:

"What would I do today if I needed ZERO approval from anyone?"

Then... **do it**.

Even if it's small.

Even if it feels uncomfortable.

Because the only way to **reprogram** yourself is through action.

- Wear the outfit you *want*, not the one you think is “acceptable.”
- Say what you *mean*, not what you think they want to hear.
- Make the choice that excites *you*, not the one that will “look good” to others.

At first, it'll feel scary.

But then, something magical happens...

You realize you didn't die.

You didn't get exiled from the tribe.
The world didn't collapse.

And in that moment, you take back something priceless:

Your own power.

One day, something shifts.

Maybe it happens gradually.

Maybe it happens all at once.

But you wake up... and realize **you feel different.**

You feel lighter.

You're no longer overanalyzing every word before you say it.
You're no longer holding back from doing what excites you.
You're no longer anxiously scanning the room, wondering if people approve.

Because, for the first time in your life... **you don't need them to.**

That's the moment you realize:

- **You don't need permission to be yourself.**
- **You don't need validation to make your own choices.**
- **You don't need to fit into a mold that was never meant for you.**

And when you stop *needing* these things...

You become untouchable.

Not in a way that makes you cold or indifferent.

But in a way that makes you **free**.

Unapologetic. Unshaken. Fully alive.

The weight you carried for years—the fear of judgment, the need for approval—is **gone**.

And in its place?

A new kind of confidence.

A quiet, unshakable certainty.

The kind that can't be given to you by others.

Because it comes from within.

When you stop caring about what others think, something incredible happens:

- You **speak up** without hesitation.
- You **take risks** you once avoided.
- You **attract people** who love you for who you actually are—not the version of you that was edited for approval.
- You **gain power** over your own life in a way you never thought possible.

Because for the first time, you're making choices **for you**.

Not to impress.
Not to conform.
Not to avoid criticism.

But because it's what you truly want.

That's real freedom.

And the best part?

It was always available to you.

The only thing standing in the way was an illusion—one that was never real to begin with.

Now, you see through it.

Now, you know the truth.

And now...

You get to live.

If you've read this far, something inside you knows: It's time.

Time to drop the weight.

Time to live on your own terms.

Time to stop waiting for the world's permission.

Because here's the reality:

No one is going to give you permission to be yourself.

You have to take it.

And once you do?

You'll never look back.

Until next time,

Anton

Dancer, Writer, Buddhist.

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